

Interpretation

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An Overlooked Motive in Alcibiades' *Symposium* Speech

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Recent interpretations of Plato's *Symposium* have placed increasingly greater significance upon the speech of Alcibiades. His encomium of Socrates, and the encounter with him that borders the speech on both sides, is now considered by many commentators essential to a thorough understanding of the dialogue. Yet, too often, an incomplete explanation is given for its importance. While we do not aim here to provide a comprehensive interpretation of Alcibiades' role in the dialogue, we do hope to offer evidence for the long-overlooked motive driving Alcibiades' speech in praise of Socrates and, thereby, to contribute to a better understanding of the dialogue as a whole. We will do this by focusing attention upon two aspects of Alcibiades' speech that have been widely neglected: first, what the speech communicates about Alcibiades' motive; and second, what Socrates' behavior, in declining the sexual proposition, reveals about the role of freedom in this encounter.

There are as many interpretations of the scene with Alcibiades as there are of the *Symposium* as a whole. Some scholars hold that his entrance represents the necessary counterweight to the lofty discourse of Diotima, showing that the philosopher cannot escape the everyday world;¹ others have argued that Alcibiades' speech reveals in practice what Socrates constructs in theory, having Socrates enact the teachings of Diotima by refusing Alcibiades' invitation. Our specific objection is directed, on the one hand, toward those who interpret Socrates as an ascetic or sage, and, on the other, toward two leading scholars who find evidence in Alcibiades' speech of Socrates' inability to sustain interpersonal relationships: Martha Nussbaum, who argues that Socrates is incapable of love for particular persons, and Gregory Vlastos, who suspects the presence of an ultimate zone of frigidity in Socrates' soul.²

Against these interpretations, we argue that the encounter with Alcibiades displays not an inadequacy in Socratic Eros but the threat to human relations posed by the kind of Eros Alcibiades exhibits. We claim further that Plato uses Alcibiades' sexual proposition to expose the contrast between these two forms of Eros, embodied in Socrates and Alcibiades, respectively. The conflict be-

tween them is not meant simply to show that Socrates lives by the teaching of Diotima, but neither does it merely denigrate physical Eros for dwelling at the Ladder of Love's lowest rung, since love for particular persons is nowhere denied its importance. Rather, Socrates' relationship to Alcibiades, and his response to his erotic proposition in *Symposium*, is necessitated by the younger man's character. The seduction incident, as recounted in Alcibiades' speech, adds a further perspective to the dialogue's discussion of Eros, a perspective that neither faults Socratic Eros nor presents his particular act of abstention as the consequence of a general rule of life to be emulated.³ Instead, Socrates' rebuff underscores how the antiphilosophical Alcibiades misconstrues Eros and, in the process, threatens the Socratic exercise of freedom. After exploring key passages to confirm that it is Socrates' freedom which Alcibiades seeks to undermine through his seduction attempt, we will then show how Socrates' Eros is compatible with Plato's conception of freedom, while Alcibiades' Eros is not. Our conclusion defends the example of freedom as Socrates practices it, and suggests that, rather than having to renounce his erotic nature in order to perfect his freedom, Socrates' Eros is what impels him toward his novel understanding of freedom.

Socrates unveils both Alcibiades' motive and his *modus operandi* in his rejoinder at 218e–219a. There, Socrates accuses Alcibiades of attempting to offer his body to the philosopher in trade for wisdom, but it is unclear what such an exchange could mean.⁴ In particular, the impulse behind this attempt remains unexplored in many interpretations of *Symposium*. In what follows, we will show that Alcibiades' speech reveals his desire to dominate Socrates as the underlying aim of his seduction attempt, a motive that clarifies the significance of the proposed "exchange."

Socrates knows, and states explicitly, that Alcibiades is trying to gain an advantage over him. That he sees right through the ploy is evinced by what he says at 218e3–5: "If you then try to make a deal with me that involves trading our respective beauties, then you're planning to gain an advantage [*pleonektein*] over me."⁵ Alcibiades would gain an advantage, presumably, because the exchange would be an exchange of bronze for gold, that is, what Alcibiades offers is worth less than what Socrates has to give. But as Alcibiades cannot really come to possess Socrates' wisdom in this way, it is unclear how this act of seduction would constitute an advantage for Alcibiades, unless the advantage would lie solely in Socrates' mere acceptance of the offer.⁶ It may be that Alcibiades is trying to gain an advantage, not by possessing Socrates' gold, but by bringing Socrates to *want* to make an exchange in the first place. Trading gold for bronze would prove that Socrates, too, has a price. Exposing Socrates' character as corruptible would reduce the philosopher's indomitable air of superiority and permit the frustrated young man to feel less ashamed of himself.

That his decision to attempt to seduce Socrates follows immediately upon his acknowledgment, "I felt I should obey him in everything," at 217a, con-

firms that the seduction plan was prompted by the impotence Alcibiades felt in the philosopher's presence. His revealing speech makes clear that his strategy is driven by a desire for possession; sexual seduction is simply a means to this end.⁷ Why does Alcibiades desire to possess Socrates? Not because he truly seeks to gain in wisdom through the exchange. Rather, the desire is propelled directly by his sense of inferiority in the face of Socrates' character. Alcibiades, perhaps more than any other interlocutor, understands this character, and he is able to appreciate that, in some way, Socrates is his superior. Yet, he himself is torn between the desire to follow Socrates and his preoccupation with the things of the city. His desire to possess Socrates issues, at least in part, from the shame he admits to feeling in the presence of this superior man. Alcibiades confesses at 215e–216a:

I heard Pericles and other good orators and I believe they spoke well, but I was not affected at all like this, nor was my soul disturbed and angered at my being in the position of a slave; but due to this Marsyas here I've often been put in that position, so that it seemed to me that it was not worth living to be as I am. And this, Socrates, you will not deny to be true. And still even now, I am conscious that if I were willing to give ear I could not hold out against him; I would suffer the same things. For he compels me to agree that though I am myself in much need, I neglect myself and attend to the affairs of Athens. So I stop my ears by force as if against the Sirens and run away, in order that I may not grow old sitting here beside him. Before him alone among men I suffer what one might not have supposed is in me—shame before anyone. Before him alone I feel ashamed. For I am conscious that I cannot contradict him and say it isn't necessary to do what he bids, but when I leave him, I am worsted by the honors of the multitude. So I desert him and flee, and when I see him I am shamed by my own agreements.⁸

Alcibiades' sense of shame in the face of the Socratic example is portrayed as being quite intense; and his shame confirms that the great military and political leader is inflamed by Socrates' unconventional superiority. In order to have a sense of Socrates' superiority, Alcibiades must somehow be capable of seeing things in the light of quite different standards than those prized in Periclean Athens. His employment of the Silenus image attests that Alcibiades has had the privilege of such a shift of perspective; he has been afforded the opportunity for a glimpse "inside" the satyr-like Socrates. His deepened appreciation of Socrates shows the nascent possibility in Alcibiades that cannot come to birth; it conflicts with, even while becoming mingled with, a more conventional view of things. Under the spell of the philosopher's discourse, Alcibiades has glimpsed the world from a Socratic point of view, a perspective from which his accustomed way of life appears despicable; but he is unable to live with this image of himself, and he cannot bring himself to change.⁹

What is more, Alcibiades' pride prevents him from tolerating for long the humbling contrast between Socrates and himself. He can see no better way to escape shame—being unable, or unwilling, to live as Socrates lives—than to remove Socrates from his pedestal. So he sets out to demonstrate the unreality of Socrates' philosophical perspective by proving that, after all, Socrates obeys the same laws, lives in the same world, and is subject to the same forces that move other men. Alcibiades cannot square the perspective induced by Socrates with his previous view of life. This nephew of Pericles is used to being worshipped and respected; but Socrates, rather than being awestruck, chastens the younger, putatively more erotic man. From Alcibiades' perspective, Socrates should have become subject to him by succumbing to the same qualities—his good looks, irresistible charm, and military brilliance—that have captivated others. In order to return things to their natural order, therefore, Alcibiades sets out to bring Socrates under his spell.

Socrates appears freed from absorption in ordinary desires and fears, making the philosopher seem self-sufficient and self-assured. This drives Alcibiades, and other frustrated interlocutors, to complain about the air of superiority given off by Socrates' practice of freedom. Alcibiades dimly recognizes that the love of wisdom making Socrates uniquely erotic has direct implications for the exercise of his own freedom, a freedom, presumably, that Alcibiades cherishes.¹⁰ It is just Socrates' example that makes Alcibiades feel ashamed. The only way to escape his shame would be to get rid of Socrates (the one who inspires it in him), but, obviously, Socrates' physical death would not suffice. The problem is not Socrates' mere existence, but his extraordinary character. As a ghost, Socrates' greatness would haunt him, but if it were possible to slay Socrates' *character*, Alcibiades would be free and even become his superior. Thus, Alcibiades must eliminate the threatening feature of Socrates' character—he must seduce him to sully his character. In that way, Socrates would become ordinary, a calculating man subject to human desire and willing to sell himself at some price. At the same time, Alcibiades would elevate himself as an object of desire in Socrates' estimation of him. If Alcibiades could make the one who shames him desire him, he could destroy his painful awareness of Socrates' superiority, gain the upper hand in their relationship, and, in this sense, dominate Socrates. Alcibiades probably does not realize consciously why he so desperately wants Socrates to desire him, but it is no doubt as a way of subverting Socrates' seemingly insuperable character, and thus redeeming his own self-esteem.

Through Alcibiades' encomium of him, Plato allows the reader to see clearly the acquisitive tendencies that suffuse both Alcibiades' attraction to Socrates and his understanding of Eros. Because he is "possessed" by Socrates' divine madness, Alcibiades wants, at bottom, to possess Socrates, believing that he can relieve his dissatisfaction with himself through such a conquest. It is in order to accomplish this objective that the proudly handsome Alcibiades

deploys his beauty to captivate Socrates, plotting to gain an advantage erotically that he has been unable to gain in any other way.¹¹ But Socrates exposes his sexual offer as an outgrowth of the impulse to *pleonektein* over him.

For Plato, *pleonexia* denotes a natural human desire for “the more” (*to pleion*). In a political context, he frequently uses *pleonexia* to describe the insatiable appetites that undergird Athenian imperialism. These appetites feed the lust for power, inciting deceitfulness in political leaders. Such boundless desire to get disproportionately more is epitomized in Glaucon’s speech in *Republic* II, and it forms the locus of Callicles’ argument from nature at *Gorgias* 483c and following. In *Symposium*’s penultimate scene, Plato shows how Alcibiades’ individualism, as the natural outgrowth of his appetitiveness, threatens to usurp Socrates’ freedom. Alcibiades’ desire to gain the advantage over Socrates, as we shall show below, issues from the same corrosive impulse that, in Plato’s portrayal, is symptomatic of the Eros that desires to possess or assimilate its object.¹²

This same desire to get more than one’s fair share at the expense of others emerges in Thucydides’ *History* as the chief emblem of Alcibiades’ character. Thucydides regularly describes Alcibiades with words such as *pleonektein* and the noun *pleonexia* in connection with the love of honor (*philotimia*). Alcibiades’ “daring” (*tolma*) is something that, in Thucydides’ view, goes far beyond ordinary courage or manliness (*andreios*). For Thucydides, this “imperialistic quality,” this ambition for power, becomes the tragic flaw of the Athenian spirit, and Alcibiades, as the city’s boldest leader, embodies that spirit completely. Socrates seems precisely to be describing Alcibiades’ character in his discussion of the “democratic man” in *Republic*; no other Athenian represents so appropriately the degeneration of its ideals of honor and glory into a mixture of sophistry, deadly charm, and overreaching political avarice. In Thucydides’ view, his daring ambition contains the seeds of its own destruction.¹³

Alcibiades’ desire to gain the advantage over Socrates issues from the same spirited impulse; *pleonexia* can be thought of as a form of Eros, an Eros in which the desire to possess the good, ignorant of the true good and its principle of limit, takes the form of an unlimited, insatiable desire to possess. Alcibiades’ Eros is the Eros that seizes upon its object as something to be assimilated. He not only confuses the object of desire with the aim of that desire, which Socrates takes pains to distinguish through his recollection of Diotima’s teaching, but his fixation upon the object leads to the appetite to possess it.¹⁴ At bottom, Alcibiades desires to appropriate the object of his Eros, which, in this case, is Socrates.

The specific character of this acquisitive Eros requires further analysis, however. First, the plot to gain an advantage over Socrates reveals how easily Alcibiades’ Eros, bound up as it is with pride and *pleonexia*, becomes exaggerated spiritedness (*thumos*). If we recall that *thumos* is closely associated with

the love of honor (*philotimia*), it becomes clear that Diotima's speech already warns about the kind of Eros tending toward *thumos* or intertwining with *thumos*.¹⁵ Diotima says: "If you consider human ambitions, you will marvel at its irrationality, unless you reflect on what I have said, and observe how strangely men are moved by the passion for winning a name, and laying up undying glory for all time."¹⁶ Such an Eros confuses the real aim of its striving for immortality, which Diotima says is happiness, with the desire to possess its object forever, an unsatisfying substitute for immortality. Plato's likening of this Eros to the other appetites, hunger and thirst, draws attention to the way this "misguided Eros"—to borrow John Brentlinger's phrase—fastens upon its object.¹⁷ The proclivity toward exaggeration in this form of desire issues from the sense of dissatisfaction it suffers once it gains hold of its object. This dissatisfaction is caused by the fact that, in possessing any object, this Eros clutches only what is intermediate to its elusive, inarticulate aim. In Alcibiades' case, he is unable to understand that the Eros that initially impelled him to seek out Socrates' guidance has been transformed into an unbridled desire to possess Socrates.

By contrast, Socratic Eros is modulated by the realization that what it seeks is not an object that can be possessed. Socrates professes that he does not possess wisdom, but that he is the wisest man in Athens on account of his positive ignorance. His kind of Eros consists solely in neither lack nor possession, maintaining itself in a middle ground between lack (simple ignorance), on the one hand, and full possession or attainment of the desired good (knowledge), on the other. Aware of its lack and guided by the good toward which it strives, Socratic Eros is not the acquisitive Eros; rather, it realizes that the incompleteness of human being is remediable only through death. The seeming paradox of Socratic ignorance derives from the paradox of being human: as long as one lives, one remains incomplete, and completion comes only when one's life is over. Alcibiades does not grasp that the dialectic of subjugation and domination in human interaction, like the cycle of acquisition and disposal in the material world, is an endless cycle. (Or if he does grasp that, once embarked upon, the striving for honor and material gain will never end, he fails to appreciate it as a problem.)

When viewed through the lens of his frank expressions of hostility and re-
 crimination, Alcibiades' desire to seduce Socrates can be seen for what it really is—a transparent attempt to dominate him.¹⁸ Socrates' resistance to being over-
 powered in this way is part of an over-all *askesis* of freedom practiced by the philosopher. Alcibiades' criticism of Socrates, put forward as an encomium in
 praise of him, allows Plato to exemplify the exercise of freedom concretely
 without engaging in an elaborate theoretical discussion of it. Three critical
 components of this practice of freedom are articulated in Alcibiades' en-
 comium: (1) self-knowledge—Socrates is said to harmonize *logos* and *ergon*,

and this shows self-knowledge to be the basis for his *sophrosune*; (2) self-mastery (*enkrateia*)—Socrates is praised for his self-mastery, for controlling himself even under extreme conditions; and (3) self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*)—Socrates is portrayed as impenetrable and aloof, freed from the needs driving ordinary men and never the beneficiary in exchange relations.

The numerous examples Alcibiades gives of Socrates' *sophrosune* illustrate the first prominent feature of Socratic freedom. But scholars often focus on the sense of "temperance" suggested by the term and, therefore, tend to read the speech as a portrayal of an ascetic saint or Stoic sage. Socrates is described by Alcibiades as exercising self-control in every situation, exhibiting power over necessity, displaying unshakable independence and self-sufficiency. Independence, or self-sufficiency, is expressed by another characteristic mark of Socratic freedom: Socrates' unwillingness to accept gifts or payments (a practice central to his testimony in Plato's *Apology of Socrates*).¹⁹ This policy keeps the philosopher free to converse with whomever he wishes, he is never required to converse with someone because he is being paid to do so. Unlike the sophists, who were obliged by their fee-based services to satisfy their customers, Socrates, as Henry Teloh rightly notices, did not have to pander to his interlocutors. He is free to speak the truth to them, if he chooses to speak with them at all. The Socratic refusal to accept gifts or fees is connected to his own prized role as a benefactor to others.

Fifth-century Athens was a highly stratified society; one person could place another in debt by conferring a gift or a benefit.²⁰ The recipient of such a benefit remains in the debt of the benefactor until a greater benefit is given in return. If the benefit cannot be repaid, the beneficiary must acknowledge and honor the beneficence. Honoring the benefactor displays the debtor's abiding gratitude when no form of repayment is possible or adequate. In the face of such an exchange economy, Socrates is able to maintain his resolute independence. Instead of trying to gain the upper hand in gift relations simply by conferring rather than receiving material benefits, Socrates claims to be conferring an incommensurable gift upon others, while appealing to his poverty as an emblem of his own noble motives. He may be poor, but he is never in anyone's debt. In regarding himself as the greatest gift to Athens, Socrates positions himself as a benefactor to his city rather than a beneficiary; he occupies a superior position within a general economy of gift exchange. Since, in the face of this exchange economy, Socrates' self-sufficiency becomes paramount for the exercise of his freedom, it is no wonder that Alcibiades attempts to lure him into some form of exchange.²¹ Through the course of his speech it becomes evident that Alcibiades knew full well the futility of his attempt to broker an exchange with the incorruptible Socrates. In one of the most revealing passages in his speech, after his covert motive has been exposed by Socrates, Alcibiades declares, "I was well aware that you'd be more likely to get a weapon through

Ajax's guard than you would money through Socrates" (219e). Even as a chaperoned youth, Alcibiades knew that Socrates was incorruptible, but he could not resist one last attempt at bribing him.

To understand fully the uniqueness of Socratic freedom, it is necessary to contrast it to the external, political freedom prized by fifth-century Athenians. External freedom, the freedom from bondage or slavery signified by the Greek word *eleutheria*, is freedom negatively defined. In its most extreme form, it amounts to the mere license of doing whatever one wishes; it presupposes having and holding some political power, whether at the level of the individual or the city, and it implies occupying the superior position within a hierarchy of domination.²² By contrast, Socratic freedom not only inverts the logic of the gift economy, it also contravenes the dialectic of subjugation-dominance that characterized social and political relations in Athenian life. In Plato's portrayal, Socratic freedom is exercised not at the expense of the freedom of others, but rather through an effort that is potentially liberating for his interlocutors. The philosopher maintains his freedom through practices designed to open doors for others as well.

Whereas Socrates makes it a practice to avoid exchange relations, Alcibiades seems to conceive all human relations as a form of exchange. In praising Socrates' military record, Alcibiades says, "Then there's his behavior in combat; I owe him an account of this, to cover my debt" (220d). He explains how Socrates saved his life in battle, but he places greatest stress upon the fact that his benefactor allowed him (the honor-lover, Alcibiades) to claim the glory. It is most ironic, then, that he should accuse Socrates of one-upmanship in the tug-of-war for Agathon's attention following the speech. The celebrated military hero complains, "He thinks he always has to go one better than me" (222e). Yet, it is Socrates who eschews the cycle of one-upmanship throughout Alcibiades' story of their encounter by refusing to be drawn into the exchange framework into which Alcibiades seeks to lure him. The legendary cross-examiner even allows to go unchallenged six different claims by Alcibiades when he is explicitly offered the chance to dispute them (at 215b[twice], 216a, 217b, 219b–c, and 220e).

A close reading of the phrasing of Alcibiades' sexual proposition and the language Socrates uses to rebuke him yields clear evidence that Socrates is not resisting his aggressive solicitation as an act of renunciation; rather, he is unwilling to compromise the quintessential dimension of his character, namely his resolute practice of freedom. To be sure, the Socratic exercise of freedom entails an entire *askesis*, but it is not ascetic in the monastic sense of self-denial. Through his distinctive exercise of freedom, Socrates aims to invert not only the subjugation-dominance model of human interaction and its connection to the benefactor-beneficiary relation (both of which are entailed within Alcibiades' exchange framework); he also undercuts the traditional roles of *erastes* and *eramenon*, lover and beloved.

While it is impossible to explore Greek homoerotic practices in detail within the scope of this essay, it is necessary to highlight one important aspect of them that illuminates how such relations were predominantly understood in fifth-century Athens. The striking feature of social relations, and one most relevant for our discussion, is that even among citizen-men of relatively equal age, wealth, education, and social standing, there seems to have been a constant assessment of relative advantage, of power, and of freedom; even where one expects to find optimal equality, there persists a tendency to conceive of human relations as being asymmetrical. Conventional Greek morality stratified social relations by means of stark dichotomies: active-passive, manly men—soft men, freeman-slave, and, as we have seen above, benefactor-beneficiary. The dialectic of lover and beloved is constructed within, and according to, this conventional hierarchy.

It is against this background that Alcibiades' behavior toward Socrates must be interpreted and judged. After completing the story of his foiled seduction, Alcibiades supplies still further evidence of his true motives. He says that Socrates "escaped the only trap I thought stood a chance of ensnaring him" (219e). Yet, for all his scheming devices, Alcibiades confesses that "no slave has been utterly more in the power of any master than I was in his" (219e). The extent to which Alcibiades conceives his freedom in terms of a subjugation-domination model is revealed by these comments. Supposing that one either rules another or is ruled by him, and that all relations between human beings must involve a ruler and a ruled, a master and a slave, Alcibiades maneuvers to get the better of Socrates.²³

Socrates' behavior must also be interpreted within the context of conventional Athenian practices. His resistance to Alcibiades' overtures follows from his customary struggle to invert (or contravene) conventional hierarchies in practice. As in *Symposium*, Socrates can be seen in several other dialogues redefining the prevalent relationships between an active, older lover and a passive, younger beloved. The old erotic cuts a curious figure as a lover, subverting customary roles in an elaborate game of seduction, first reversing, and then completely discarding, the pederastic model. Such a reversal of roles is especially familiar from dialogues such as *Charmides*, *Lysis*, and *Alcibiades I*. In these conversations, Socrates employs his distinctive Eros to arouse the passions of his interlocutor, a strategy he carries out with the aim of empowering the unsuspecting youth and pointing his way to freedom. By the end of the conversation, the ugly, old philosopher himself ironically supplants the beautiful boys as the prized object of adoration and pursuit.²⁴ Alcibiades describes this same sort of reversal in his *Symposium* speech. He shamelessly notes the irony at 217c, exclaiming, "as if I were the lover and he were the boy." What is unique about the reversal in the present context is that a more or less passive role is ascribed to Socrates.

The philosopher's usual tool for setting this reversal in motion is a calculated arousal of the youth's deep-seated desires. The young boy typically as-

sumes that, due to his beauty, intelligence, and noble birth, the world will effortlessly be his. Once he detects such conceits, the wily philosopher inflames the youth's desire and then shames him in order to inspire him to take greater care of himself. In the *Lysis* and *Alcibiades I*, the erotic arousal is followed almost immediately by a powerful chastening; the two components of his erotic strategy are displayed together. In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades refers to past agreements between himself and Socrates; and it is necessary to refer back to their first conversation (*Alcibiades I*) both to understand these past agreements and to confirm that a prior arousal has, indeed, taken place.²⁵

The erotic reversal practiced by Socrates is not a countermove in a game of subjugation and domination; rather, the Socratic reversal both expresses Socrates' freedom and attempts to liberate others. To understand this, it is necessary to see first how the chief features of Socratic freedom, highlighted in Alcibiades' encomium—*sophrosune*, self-mastery (*enkrateia*) and self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*)—form the basis of Socrates' chastening of Alcibiades.

Rather than simply accepting the status conditions for political liberty as the model for his understanding and practice of freedom, Socrates insists upon a different kind of relation between the freedom of the city and the freedom of the individual. Socratic freedom would not only involve the absence of external constraints, rights of citizenship, freedom of movement, and access to legislative and juridical institutions constituting freedom within Periclean democracy; throughout the dialogues, Socrates both criticizes the prevalent assumptions about how a freeman should behave and replaces mere citizenship with the well-ordered soul as the key constituent of freedom. In fact, the condition for the possibility of Socratic freedom becomes the ability to rule oneself. The isomorphism between the well-ordered city and the well-ordered individual leads Socrates to insist that proper self-rule tends to prevent abuses of rulership and, therefore, should be developed as a prerequisite for ruling. It is just this freedom that Socrates made the focus of his approach to the young Alcibiades in their inaugural conversation, and it is precisely this freedom exhibited by Socrates that shames Alcibiades into feeling like a slave. (Ironically, the one point in the speech where the obdurate Alcibiades seems to understand full well what he is doing is the point at which he resolves to stay away from Socrates.)

Whereas Alcibiades' spirited, acquisitive Eros jeopardizes the freedom of others, Socrates' Eros contributes to the freedom of others. He is shown in various Platonic dialogues trying to liberate his interlocutors from their present constraints. These constraints may arise from trust in traditions, conventional practices, unexamined beliefs, or a conflicted structure of desires. In particular, Socrates endeavors to disabuse his young interlocutors of the presumption that all forms of limitation entail constraints upon their freedom; to the extent that he is successful, he leads his young pupils to increased self-sufficiency through his own example.

From the example of the historical Alcibiades, we learn that the Eros mingled with *thumos*, *pleonexia*, and *philotimia* is a highly volatile political force. Left unregulated, it may produce disastrous effects in social and political relations. In his personal and political dealings, Alcibiades manifests his belief that only by expansion and aggression can greatness be achieved. His speech to the Athenian Assembly (as depicted by Thucydides) argues for such aggrandizement veiled beneath his “dominate-or-be-dominated” logic. A recent article describes him as one who “collected lovers as part of a power game. Their flattery and importunity confirmed the irresistibility of his attraction and the finality of his hold over their minds” (Finlay, “Night,” p. 60). The problem with Alcibiades' Eros is that it understands only the dialectic of subjugation and domination; it is too closely tied to spiritedness to be compatible with Socratic freedom. By having Alcibiades follow the speech of Socrates, using extraordinary frankness (*parresia*) and professing that “truth comes from wine” (217e), Plato invites the reader to consider the profound and disparate consequences of the acquisitive Eros in full career.²⁶

NOTES

1. J. L. Penwill, for example, holds this view, arguing that the movement of *Symposium* parallels the ascent and return motif of the *Republic*. See J. L. Penwill, “Men in Love: Aspects of Plato's *Symposium*,” *Ramus* 7 (1978): 143–75. Charles Kahn and Henry Wolz also take this position. See Kahn, “Plato's Theory of Desire,” *Review of Metaphysics* 44 (1987): 77–103, and Wolz, “Philosophy as Drama: An Approach to Plato's *Symposium*,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 30 (1969–70): 323–53.

2. The ascetic view is, of course, the more Stoic view of Socrates. Michael Gagarin, for example, takes Vlastos to task from this point of view. Gagarin argues that Socrates embodies the Eros of which Diotima teaches, placing him at the pinnacle of the ascent. Socrates' hubris, in Gagarin's view, causes his failure as a teacher. He interprets Socrates as a wise man whose hubris consists in veiling the fact that he really does have knowledge about beauty. See Gagarin, “Socrates' *Hybris* and Alcibiades' Failure,” *Phoenix* 31 (1977): 22–37. Similarly, Cornford argues that the spiritual and metaphysical paths described in Diotima's speech converge or come down to the same thing. See F. M. Cornford, “The Doctrine of *Eros* in Plato's *Symposium*,” in *The Unwritten Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), pp. 68–80.

Martha C. Nussbaum, “The Speech of Alcibiades: A Reading of the *Symposium*,” in *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 165–99. For an excellent article surveying the various positions staked out on the question of particularity and the degree of uniqueness possible in the Platonic conception of love, see Christopher Gill, “Platonic Love and Individuality,” in *Polis and Politics*, ed. A. Loizon and H. Lesser (Aldershot: Avebury, 1990), pp. 69–88. Gill argues that Plato's notion of love allows for particularity but not for the uniqueness modern readers expect to find.

This comment comes at the end of Vlastos's 1971 paper, “The Paradox of Socrates,” in *The Philosophy of Socrates: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Gregory Vlastos (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1971), pp. 1–21. His fuller, and somewhat revised, view of Socratic Eros can be found in “The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato,” in *Platonic Studies*, ed. Gregory Vlastos (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 3–11. From a quite different perspective, Stanley Rosen, too, sees Socrates' response to Alcibiades as reflecting a shortcoming in Socrates'

character. See Rosen, *Plato's Symposium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), chap. 8. He explains: "The unsatisfactory character of the love affair between Socrates and Alcibiades is a necessary consequence of the peculiarity of Socrates' Eros, which can only desire divine things or beings" (p. 279). Allan Bloom sees Socrates' approach to such young and beautiful boys as Alcibiades, Lysis, and Charmides as designed to fracture their self-assurance and thereby to erode any basis for their vanity. While we agree that a powerful chastening or humbling is an essential component of Socrates' approach to these youths, it must not be overlooked that Socrates bears some responsibility for inflaming the latent desires he will go on to sabotage. Bloom calls Socrates' love of wisdom "his only profound passion," and imagines that succumbing to Alcibiades' allure might undermine their shared passion for philosophy. See Bloom, *Love and Friendship* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), p. 433.

3. Nevertheless, the speech does offer a powerful critique of Socratic irony. It is the irony surrounding Socrates' role as lover, knower, believer, and political actor that leads others to accuse him of dissimulation. But this means that erotic shortcomings are not the reason for Socrates' irony; rather, Socratic irony produces the amorous confusion in Alcibiades. We are arguing that whatever deficiencies Socrates may have as a lover, they are not deficiencies of his understanding of Eros. That Alcibiades is intoxicated and uses *parresia* to express his "truths" to Socrates permits the reader to see both the underside of the Socratic method and the nature of the young men he feels appointed to reform. And the fact that Plato converges these two purposes, allowing the single harshest critique of Socrates to be placed in the inebriated mouth of the most notorious and compelling character of his day, may be his way of showing readers that it is an interlocutor's character that causes him to misconstrue Socrates or regard him as a dissembler.

4. Socrates accuses Alcibiades with the phrase, *anti doxes alethias kalon ktasthai epicheireis* (218e–219a). For clarification of precisely how Alcibiades is exchanging opinion for truth, see Gary Alan Scott, "Irony and Inebriation in Plato's *Symposium*: The Disagreement between Socrates and Alcibiades Over Truth-Telling," *Journal of Neoplatonic Studies* 3, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 25–60. This article elaborates the contrast between Socrates' ethical truth-telling and Alcibiades' inebriated "free speech." It is enough to note here that when Plato has the dialogue's narrator highlight his "frankness" (*parresia*), at 222c2, this provides a clue to the kind of truth-telling in which Alcibiades is engaged. Eros and the venom of a spurned lover are mingled here with a strangely revelatory admission: Alcibiades is unable to do what he knows to be best for him. The reader can only wonder how far Alcibiades' self-recognition goes, that is, to what extent his acknowledgment of what is really good for him has been taken to heart. His damning speech may exemplify the upsurge of words propelled by inebriation, but the words that portend to the reader the eventual fates of both Alcibiades and Socrates often seem to bypass the speaker's own self-awareness.

5. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 65. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from *Symposium* are from Waterfield's translation.

6. Alcibiades imagines that becoming Socrates' beloved would entitle him to receive "everything he knew" (217a). Implicit in this remark is the presumption that the recalcitrant Alcibiades would hear something more (or different) as Socrates' sexual partner than he now hears. Heir to a theme that harkens back to the incident on the couch with Agathon following Socrates' belated arrival at the party, Alcibiades appears to think that such a transfer of knowledge follows automatically from hearing what another knows. Socrates, of course, has no formulaic knowledge to lavish upon him, and he has already vitiated this conception of learning, teasing, "wouldn't it be nice if wisdom were like that, Agathon." Would that knowledge could "flow by contact from someone who had more of it into someone who had less of it" (175d). But if this was all Socrates meant to say, he could simply have *shown* Alcibiades that sex was not the path to wisdom.

7. Bloom explains Alcibiades' seduction attempt this way:

"He candidly tells the world that his passions make him think he has a right to the sole possession of Socrates, but his reason informs him that he does not. Everything is up to Socrates. He can have Alcibiades if he wants him. It is difficult to determine whether it is Alcibiades' Eros that is insulted or whether it is his *amour-propre*, whether Socrates has become necessary because he does not esteem Alcibiades as Alcibiades wants to be esteemed. It is probably a combination of the two, for Alcibiades really does love what Socrates says. He has natural good taste, which is proved by

his recognition of Socrates' superiority. But he wants Socrates not only to be good but to be his own, his possession, and that he can never attain" (p. 534).

Bloom goes on to link Alcibiades' attraction to Socrates to the challenge to his vanity posed by Socrates' claim that the youth does not know enough to rule. But beneath this motive, for Bloom, is Socrates' vexing self-sufficiency, that is, the fact that Socrates does not experience the needs others experience. But Bloom never connects this feature of Socrates' character to the exercise of freedom more generally.

It is worth recalling here that the historical Alcibiades was notoriously promiscuous. His sexual appetite and his penchant for seduction led him to violate one of the most sacrosanct bonds for a Greek when he seduced the wife of his guest-friend, King Agis, while exiled in Sparta. Plutarch follows other ancient sources in ascribing his death in Phrygia in 403 to the outrage of a well-known family whose daughter he had seduced. Socrates, as Bloom notes, is the one person to really get to Alcibiades and make him feel vulnerable, so it is Socrates that Alcibiades most wants to conquer with his charms.

8. *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. R. E. Allen, vol. 2, *The Symposium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 161–62.

9. His critique of Socrates, of course, entails a powerful critique of philosophy for calling ambitious political actors such as Alcibiades away from the things of the city; but the encounter between Socrates and Alcibiades in *Symposium* frames more than just the tension between philosophy and politics, between a private and a public life.

10. Only a few twentieth-century German scholars—most notably, Gompers, Maier, Jaeger, and Friedländer—have developed the notion of freedom as central to Socrates' behavior in the dialogues. Other commentators have often recognized one or more features of Socrates' freedom without exploring the coherent notion of freedom into which these features are unified. Hence, one finds little or no explication of the meaning of his distinctive practices for Socrates' freedom. Bloom, for example, recognizes that Socrates "marches only to the beat of his own drummer," and that he alone remains independent of the opinions of his contemporaries, but he connects these features of Socrates' character only to his self-sufficiency, emphasizing that Socrates "did not need money; he apparently hardly needed food; he did not need to have sexual intercourse with anyone; he was not afraid of anything; and, above all, he was utterly indifferent to applause or what people thought about him" (p. 531).

The closing lines of the *Alcibiades I* confirm both that Alcibiades realizes the consequences for his own freedom and that he cherishes that freedom.

Soc. And are you now conscious of your own state? And do you know whether you are a freeman or not?

Al. I think that I am very conscious indeed of my own state.

Soc. And do you know how to escape out of your present state, which I do not even like to name when imputing it to beauty?

Al. Yes, I do.

Soc. How?

Al. By your help, Socrates.

Soc. That is not well said, Alcibiades.

Al. What ought I to have said?

Soc. By the help of God.

Al. I agree; and I further say, that our relations are likely to be reversed. From this day forward, I must and will follow you as you have followed me; I will be the attendant, and you shall be my master.

Soc. O that is rare! My love breeds another love: and so like the stork I shall be cherished by the winged creature whom I have hatched.

Al. Strange, but true; and henceforward I shall begin to think about justice.

Soc. And I hope that you will persist; although I have fears, not because I doubt you, but because I see the power of the state, which may be too much for both of us (*Alc. I* 135d–e, Jowett [1953], 1:674–75).

11. Daniel Anderson makes a similar point in his commentary on *Symposium*. See Anderson, *The Masks of Dionysos: A Commentary on Plato's Symposium* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), pp. 122–24.

12. Steven Forde speaks in almost the same terms about Alcibiades' attempt to dominate the city as we use to describe his attempt to dominate Socrates. He writes that Alcibiades "refuses to be anything less than honest about his ambitions in the city. Alcibiades wishes to dominate the city, but frankly and openly, as it were." See Forde, *The Ambition to Rule: Alcibiades and the Politics of Imperialism in Thucydides* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 84.

John Finlay writes, "We see the same versatility in Alcibiades' political and his sexual lives.

He successively fitted into the democracy of Athens, the aristocracy of Sparta, and the despotism of Persia. He became a participant in whatever political philosophy he could use for his own machinations." Finlay, "The Night of Alcibiades," *The Hudson Review* 47, no. 1 (1994): 60.

13. Forde points out that Pericles uses the word *courage* only once in his speeches, employing *daring* at every other opportunity. His analysis of the role of *daring* in Thucydides' *History* is one of the highlights of Forde's book. He shows how inseparable this rash *daring* was from the Athenian character and its imperialistic ambition. For Thucydides, according to Forde, *daring* supplants *courage* as the specifically Athenian virtue. See Forde, *Ambition*, pp. 13–15. "Imperialistic quality" is Forde's phrase (*Ambition*, p. 19). He notes that the majority of references to Eros in Thucydides' *History* occur in connection with the Sicilian expedition and Alcibiades' encouragement of this extraordinary *daring*. Nicias, in his speech opposing the risky venture, criticizes what he sees as an "erotic passion" for faraway places, an erotic passion inspired chiefly in the Athenians by Alcibiades. We argue below that this "misguided Eros" is really a thinly veiled *thumos* because it is indistinguishable from the desire to dominate and outdo others.

Of course, Alcibiades is much more ambitious than the democrat Socrates caricatures in *Republic* VIII. There, Socrates illuminates the correspondence between the decline of individual types and the degeneration of the states that produce them. The chaos and disorder he describes come close to capturing the wavering spirit Alcibiades personifies in *Symposium*: "Yes, I said, he lives from day to day indulging the appetite of the hour; and sometimes he is lapped in drink and strains of the flute; then he becomes a water-drinker, and tries to get thin; then he takes a turn at gymnastics; sometimes idling and neglecting everything, then once more living the life of a philosopher: often he is busy with politics, and starts to his feet and says and does whatever comes into his head; and, if he is emulous of anyone who is a warrior, off he goes in that direction, or if of men of business, once more in that. His life has neither law nor order; and this distracted existence, which he terms joy and bliss and freedom, continues throughout his life" (*Republic* 561c–d [Jowett, 2:430]).

In a richly descriptive, but philosophically flawed, essay, John Finlay defends the view that Plato has Alcibiades in mind in this passage. Finlay argues that no other prominent Athenian politician possessed both the brilliance and the diversity Plato describes. Alcibiades was so versatile and yet so unabashedly hedonistic that to drink the black broth and eat the stale bread of the Spartans, while adorning himself in the coarse cloak of a Spartan aristocrat, must have seemed to him, according to Finlay, "the last novelty" (Finlay, "Night," p. 59). Finlay's treatment of the relation between Socrates and Alcibiades seems, in the last analysis, to rely too heavily upon psychologism and tends to invoke Plato in an attempt to clarify historical fact rather than the other way round.

The best example of ambition containing the seeds of its own destruction is found in Thucydides' account of the so-called Melian dialogue. In their cruel arrogance, the Athenians killed all adult males and forced the women and children of the tiny island of Melos into slavery for attempting to maintain their neutrality in the war. According to Thucydides, Alcibiades was a leading proponent of this course of action (Thucydides, *History*, 5:84–116).

14. David Halperin has developed this distinction in his article, "Plato and the Metaphysics of Desire," *Proceedings of the Boston Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 5 (1989): 27–52. From Diotima's speech, we learn that the beautiful is not the ultimate object of Eros. Eros, at bottom, aims at happiness, the final good, to which the many instances of beauty are intermediate. For Halperin, Eros always longs for something beyond its immediate object, something transcendent to

the particular object. The longing for immortality is shown, in Diotima's teachings, to give expression to this desire to attain (or dwell in) the beautiful forever. See also Nussbaum's critical commentary following Halperin's article for a wide-ranging discussion of Nussbaum's disagreement with Halperin's reading.

15. At *Republic* 581a–b, Plato has Socrates say:

“And, again, of the high-spirited element, do we not say that it is wholly set on predominance and victory and good repute?

Yes, indeed.

And might we not appropriately designate it as the ambitious part and that which is covetous of honor?

Most appropriately.”

(Shorey translation in *Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961], p. 808.)

16. *Symposium* 208c. Translation by F. M. Cornford. Cited in “The Doctrine of Eros in Plato's *Symposium*,” in *The Unwritten Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), pp. 68–80. The passage quoted appears on page 74.

17. John A. Brentlinger, “Introduction: The Cycle of Becoming in the *Symposium*,” in *The Symposium of Plato*, trans. Suzy Q. Groden and John A. Brentlinger (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), p. 6. Brentlinger calls Alcibiades' fatal flaw “excessive love of self,” which seems essentially correct. How this “love of self” is understood must be able to account for the extreme ambiguity in Alcibiades' character. In his first speech before the Athenian assembly, in which he persuades the demos to undertake the ill-fated Sicilian expedition, Alcibiades unabashedly presents a conception of honor that no longer depends upon doing service to the public good. Alcibiades introduces a view of honor as coextensive with the individual interests of great leaders (such as himself), and the people endorse it. Thus, what begins as self-love is intensified and complicated by the adulation Alcibiades relied upon for validation. See also Forde, *Ambition*, pp. 79–99.

18. Anderson points out two important aspects of this encounter that bear noting here: (1) Socrates does not, strictly speaking, reject Alcibiades. He neither leaves the bed nor forces Alcibiades to leave. This indicates to Anderson that Socrates is not struggling with his own passions; the reader does not see him renouncing his desires and resisting Alcibiades' attack in the same impulse. (2) Alcibiades is patently duplicitous, and this forces Socrates to act as he does. See Anderson, *Masks*, pp. 122–24.

19. While we shall argue that Socrates' practice of philosophy constitutes an *askesis*, it is by no means an *askesis* organized around renunciation or self-denial. Bloom explains as follows: “Whether or not Socrates ever had sexual relations with young men, sex would never have been so important to him as to get in the way of a good lesson. One cannot believe that there was no element of the body in his interest in Alcibiades, but what the body demanded was different from what the soul demanded. It would be simply false to say that the soul's satisfaction provided also for that of the body” (pp. 535–36).

Surprisingly, the over-all impact of Socrates' avoidance of forms of exchange has received little attention in the interpretive literature. Xenophon, even more than Plato, takes pains to show Socrates motivated by his desire to invert or circumvent the prevailing exchange economy. In his version of *Apology*, line 16, Socrates is made to say, “Do you know anyone less a slave to the appetites of the body than I? What man is freer than I, since I accept no gifts or pay from anyone.” The passage continues with Socrates asking, “Would you be reasonable if you believed that anyone is more just than a man so in harmony with the present circumstances that he does not ask for anyone else's possessions?” Leo Strauss sees Socrates as dependent upon his friends who, on two important occasions, are prepared to rescue Socrates from becoming a debtor. While it is true that his friends come to his aid with the explicit willingness to stand surety for Socrates' impending indebtedness, on both occasions Socrates is saved by dramatic circumstances, obviating the necessity for his friends to pay his way. At *Apology* 38d, it is the jury's vote to carry out Meletus' proposal of death that eliminates the need for Socrates' friends (including Plato himself) to cover his debt; and at

Republic 337c–d, it is the fact that Thrasymachus does not teach the philosopher anything that renders unnecessary the payment of a fine by Glaucon and the others.

20. We are indebted to David K. O'Connor of Notre Dame for his incisive remarks in a lecture, "Socrates and the Gift," presented at the 12th Annual Conference of the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy, October 30, 1993, at Binghamton University, in Binghamton, New York. Many of Professor O'Connor's insights have influenced our thinking about Socrates, and we have followed up several auspicious clues given in his talk.

21. The benefit cannot be repaid in the examples Aristotle gives in *Nicomachean Ethics* 9 of a child to the parent, mortals to the gods, or pupils to their teachers of philosophy. Of this latter relation, Aristotle says, "And so too, it seems, should one make a return to those with whom one has studied philosophy; for their worth cannot be measured against money, and they can get no honor which will balance their services, but still it is perhaps enough, as it is with the god's and with one's parents, to give them what one can" (1164a34–1164b5).

See *Apology of Socrates* 19d–20a, and also 30a5–7 and 30d5–31a. Plato has Socrates invoke his poverty as proof that he does not take a fee. This disclaimer is connected to his contention that he does not teach anybody anything, which his refusal to accept money purports to confirm. In his book-length study of Socrates' position on obeying the law, Richard Kraut wonders how Socrates has benefited the city. Taking seriously Socrates' claim that he is a gift sent by the god to exhort people to care more for their souls than for money, honor, and pleasure, Kraut concludes: "Just as ordinary moral education, with all its limitations, is a great gift we receive from our parents and the city, so moral perplexity, with all its painfulness, is the gift Socrates thinks he is giving Athens." Kraut says that Socrates does not present himself as someone who tried to improve the people of Athens but failed. Rather, he offers himself as the city's greatest gift and his benefaction is attested by his disinclination to profit from this vocation in any other way. See Kraut, *Socrates and the State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 225.

After Socrates' death, his poverty was increasingly mythologized. In fact, the historical Socrates came from a moderately well-to-do family. He did not display any of the outward trappings of wealth, although he had plenty of leisure. Since Socrates served as a hoplite soldier, and this station was assigned on the basis of property, Socrates had to have come from what would now be called an "upper middle-class" family. See Waterfield's note, *Symposium*, p. 94.

Thrasymachus finds Socrates' tactics for escaping exchange relations especially annoying. In *Republic* I, he implores the philosopher to give a meaningful, substantive definition of justice, and Socrates employs his habitual self-deprecation to evade proffering his own answer. At 337a, Socrates imputes expertise about justice to Thrasymachus, claiming that forbidding him to use any of the synonyms for justice in definition is analogous to his being proscribed from answering "twice six" or "three times four" to the question about what twelve is. Thrasymachus asks, "What if I could show you another answer about justice besides all these and better than they are?" He insists that Socrates should be fined if he can do this. Socrates says that he will pay such a fine "when I get some" (money), and Glaucon assures Thrasymachus that the others will contribute for Socrates, exclaiming, "Now, for money's sake, speak, Thrasymachus." When Thrasymachus finally relents and speaks, he says, "Here is the wisdom of Socrates; unwilling himself to teach, he goes around learning from others, and does not even give thanks to them." Socrates responds, "When you say I learn from others, you speak the truth, Thrasymachus; but when you say I do not make full payment in thanks, you lie. For I pay as much as I can. I am only able to praise. I have no money" (*Rep.* 337a–338c; *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan Bloom [New York: Basic Books, 1968], pp. 14–15).

22. A. W. H. Adkins frames the contrast between philosophical and political values in Plato as a contrast between "cooperative" and "competitive" *aretai* (excellencies or virtues). This begins to clarify the difference between Alcibiades' spirited Eros and Socrates' desire to have his interlocutors become *synerastes* in a conversational *agon*. See Adkins, *From the Many to the One* (London: Constable, 1970), pp. 145–48.

23. Seth Schein has argued that the entrance of Alcibiades is replete with evidence of Alcibiades' autocracy. His arrival immediately alters the direction of the proceedings. Already intoxicated, he insists that the consensus to imbibe temperately be abandoned for serious drinking. Filling the large amphora with undiluted wine, he drains it once himself, has the slave refill it, and orders

everyone to drink, beginning with Socrates. His behavior announces that this is a man who is accustomed to dictating the terms of every situation he graces. Alcibiades takes over the proceedings in the single act of appointing himself "symposiarch," or "leader of the drinking" (213e). Schein notes the homology in Greek between "of the drinking" and "of the city," as well as the fact that the Greek word for the leader of the symposium, *archouta*, is the same word commonly used to signify the holder of a political office (*archon*) in Athens. Seth L. Schein, "Alcibiades and the Politics of Misguided Love in Plato's *Symposium*," *Theta Pi* 3, no. 2 (1974): 158–67. Schein's short article implies much more than it develops, and we have tried to extend some of its possible implications here. He does explicate the pervasive political language of Alcibiades' speech, however, and that first suggested the idea for this essay.

24. Misunderstanding both the nature of Eros and what David Halperin calls "erotic reciprocity," Alcibiades knows only the dynamic of rivalry (*antierastes*) and not mutual eroticism (*synerastes*). See David M. Halperin, "Plato and Erotic Reciprocity," *Classical Antiquity* 5 (1986): 60–80. Halperin seems to see this reciprocity both in Socrates' terms *antierastes* and *synerastes* in the Phaedrus. But Plato's dialogue, rendered as "Lovers" (*erastes*) by most manuscripts, appears in some variant manuscript as *antierastes*, and is sometimes translated as "Rivals."

When Socrates and the targeted interlocutors become joint lovers of wisdom, they become *synerastes*, companions in the striving after wisdom. Unfortunately, very few of the boys are capable of playing this role. Socrates seems to be quite successful with Lysis, and the two of them even engage in a little conspiracy to apply the same antidote to Lysis's friend, Menexenus. Lysis surely seems to become actively engaged for the rest of the dialogue, but our knowledge of him ends with that dialogue, Alcibiades belongs to this select group of young, noble, beautiful, and promising interlocutors with whom Socrates effects this reversal of Eros. Socrates seems to enjoy a measure of success with him within the scope of their first conversation, despite the dialogue's less than sanguine conclusion. Through the course of the *Alcibiades I*, he is transformed radically, but the speech in *Symposium* confirms that this metamorphosis was short lived.

Socrates utilizes some of his most questionable tactics to effect these reversals. He is not above using outrageous examples, appealing to the fantastical desires of the youths, or engaging in false pretensions that make his assistance key to the attainment of his interlocutor's desires. He constructs faulty, even eristic, arguments that rely more heavily on seductive logic than either induction or deduction, and he often relies on irony to avoid lying to his interlocutor, in preparation for the pedagogy to follow the initial turnaround.

25. In their first conversation, Socrates does his part to arouse Alcibiades' passions, saying: "And I will tell you the hope in which you are at present living: Before many days have elapsed, you think that you will come before the Athenian Assembly, and will prove to them that you are more worthy of honour than Pericles, or any other man that ever lived, and having proved this, you will have the greatest power in the state. When you have gained the greatest power among us, you will go on to other Hellenic states, and not only to Hellenes, but to all the barbarians who inhabit the same continent with us. And if this same god were then to say to you again: Here in Europe is to be your seat of empire, and you must not cross over into Asia or meddle with Asiatic affairs, I do not believe that you would choose to live upon these terms; but the whole world, as I may say, must be filled with your power and name—I believe you think that in all history Cyrus and Xerxes are the only men of any account. Such I know to be your hopes—I am not guessing only—and very likely you, who know that I am speaking the truth, will reply, Well, Socrates, but what have my hopes to do with the explanation which you promised? And that is what I am now going to tell you, sweet son of Cleinias and Deinomache. The explanation is, that all these designs of yours cannot be accomplished by you without my help; so great is the power which I believe myself to have over you and your concerns; and this I conceive to be the reason why the god has hitherto forbidden me to converse with you, and I have been long expecting his permission. For, as you hope to prove your own surpassing value to the state, and having proved it, to attain at once to absolute power, so do I indulge a hope that I shall have the supreme power over you, if I am able to prove my own surpassing value to you, and to show you that neither guardian, nor kinsman, nor anyone is able to deliver into your hands the power which you desire, but I only, God being my helper" (*Alcibiades I* 105a–106a [Jowett, 1:630]).

At *Symposium* 216b, Alcibiades speaks of the promises he made Socrates. Another such prior

agreement is mentioned at 219b. In the *Alcibiades I*, Alcibiades agrees to attend to the matter of his self-improvement and to follow Socrates' advice. But, of course, he fails to do this.

Plato provides several clues, besides the references to past agreements, that indicate important connections to the two *Alcibiades* dialogues. Paul Friedländer astutely emphasizes this connection in the following passage, "To understand fully the speech of Alcibiades in the *Symposium*, we must look to the dialogue *Alcibiades* as its background and we must be aware constantly, in each dialogue, both of the extraordinary greatness and of the catastrophe of the historical Alcibiades" (pp. 242–43). That Plato had the *Alcibiades I* in mind, he says, is proven by the fact that Alcibiades' initial response to Socrates upon discovering him on the couch next to Agathon is parallel to his opening remark in *Alcibiades I*. His first words to Socrates at *Symposium* 213b9 are "you always lie in wait for me" and in the *Alcibiades I* (104d3) "you annoy me always." Friedländer cites further Alcibiades' emphasis in both texts on Socrates' strange nature (*Symposium* 215a; *Alcibiades I* 106a) and the fact that Alcibiades confesses in both dialogues to feeling shame in the presence of Socrates. Surprisingly, Friedländer does not mention *Symposium*'s references to past agreements and, therefore, does not explicate how these past agreements and oaths from the *Alcibiades I* illuminate both the speech in *Symposium* and the dilemma to which Alcibiades confesses therein. See Friedländer, *Plato*, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 2:243.

26. At 222c2, Apollodorus tells us that Alcibiades is using *parresia* to speak to the symposium, noting that the others in attendance found such "frankness" amusing. For a thorough discussion of the significance of Plato's use of this term in *Symposium* and his role in the transformation from political to ethical truth-telling, see Gary Alan Scott, "Games of Truth: Foucault's Analysis of the Transformation from Political to Ethical *Parrhesia*," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 34, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 97–114.